

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1-2. (canceled)

3. (Currently Amended) ~~The method of claim 1~~ A method of preparing flat articles for sorting, comprising:

receiving a bundle of flat items to be sorted, the bundle being wrapped with a flexible film such that the film forms an enclosed package of flat items;

placing one of the bundles on a substantially horizontal work surface;

manually moving the bundle adjacent at least one automated film slitter which is mounted along one side of the horizontal work surface, the film slitter being automatically activated when the bundle is moved adjacent the film slitter on the work surface;

removing the cut film from the flat items; and

stacking the unbundled flat items in a cartridge;

wherein a first film slitter is positioned at 90° relative to a second film slitter and wherein the method further comprises simultaneously cutting the film on at least two sides of the bundle, which sides are oriented at 90° relative to each other.

4-5. (canceled)

6. (Currently Amended) ~~The method of claim 1~~ A method of preparing flat articles for sorting, comprising:

receiving a bundle of flat items to be sorted, the bundle being wrapped with a flexible film such that the film forms an enclosed package of flat items;

placing one of the bundles on a substantially horizontal work surface;

manually moving the bundle adjacent at least one automated film slitter which is mounted along one side of the horizontal work surface, the film slitter being automatically activated when the bundle is moved adjacent the film slitter on the work surface;

removing the cut film from the flat items; and;

stacking the unbundled flat items in a cartridge, wherein the cartridge is supported in a self-adjusting lift, the lift adjusting the elevation of the cartridge such that the top of the stack of flat items is maintained adjacent the work surface.

7-21. (canceled)

22. (Previously Presented) A method of preparing flat articles for sorting, comprising:
receiving a bundle of flat items to be sorted into a holding bin which is elevated relative a work table proximate the holding bin, the bundle being wrapped with a flexible film such that the film forms an enclosed package of stacked flat items;

sliding the wrapped bundle along a chute from the holding bin to a horizontal work surface which comprises a top surface of the work table;

manually moving the wrapped bundle adjacent at least one automated film slitter which is mounted along one side of the horizontal work surface, the film slitter being automatically activated when the bundle is moved adjacent the film slitter on the work surface;

repeating the manual moving step as needed to slit the film along four sides of the bundle;

then manually removing the cut film from the flat items; and

then manually stacking the unbundled flat items in a cartridge positioned in proximity to the work surface.

23. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein the flat items comprise mail pieces, further comprising edging the mail pieces against side and bottom walls of the cartridge.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, further comprising transferring a cartridge full of mail to a cart.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein a first automatic film slitter is positioned at 90 degrees relative to a second automatic film slitter, wherein the method further comprises simultaneously cutting the film on at least two sides of the bundle using the first and second slitters by manually positioning the bundle against the slitters so that the slitters are actuated.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein the film slitter is a hot air slitter, the method comprising using heated air to cut the film along four sides of the bundle.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein the substantially horizontal work surface is a substantially frictionless surface provided with ball bearings.

28. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein the cartridge is supported in a self-adjusting lift, the lift adjusting the elevation of the cartridge such that the top of the stack of flat items is maintained adjacent the work surface.